INTRODUCTION

It has been almost two years since varying degrees of lockdowns were implemented across the world to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. While several sectors of the economy have resumed business as usual, the impact on education has been highly detrimental due to the indefinite nature of school closures. Digital platforms and online classes have helped to fill the void left by the absence of classroom teaching, yet the limited access of internet in many parts of the world including rural India has proved to be a challenge to consistent education delivery. As schools reopen after the third wave of COVID-19 in February 2022, it is high time to take stock of the detrimental impact of the pandemic on India’s Education Ecosystem.

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) organized a virtual roundtable titled 'Impact of COVID-19 on Education' on May 11, 2022 at 03:00 pm (IST) to highlight the adverse impacts of the pandemic on the education sector in India and beyond. It is estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic has battered education systems around the world, affecting close to 90 per cent of the world’s student population. Similarly, over 1.5 million schools closed down due to the pandemic in India, affecting 286 million children from pre-primary to secondary levels. This adds prior to COVID-19. This disruption in education has severe economic implications too. A World Bank report, 'Beaten or Broken: Informality and COVID-19 in South Asia,' has quantified the impact of school closures in monetary terms: India is estimated to lose $440 billion (Rs 32.3 lakh crore) in possible future earnings.

This roundtable was discussed the implications of the disruptions caused by the school closures along with several opportunities offered by this situation.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the roundtable were:

- To highlight the various disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant lockdowns on the delivery of education in India and beyond.
- To discuss the various opportunities for innovation such as online education, remote education, specializations, etc. offered by the pandemic.
- To discuss a way ahead to protect the education sector and students from the detrimental impacts of the pandemic.

Agenda

03:00-03:05 Welcoming Participants and Experts: Sharing Objectives of the Roundtable by Mr. Kshitij Gupta, AIDMI, India
03:05-03:20 Keynote Address on Higher Education and COVID-19 by Dr. Shweta Sinha, Thammasat University, Thailand
03:20-03:35 Impact and Opportunities for Higher Education due to COVID-19 by Mr. Trinh Trong Nghia, Plan International, Thailand
03:35-03:50 Question and Answer by All
03:50-04:00 Conclusion and Way Ahead by Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt, AIDMI, India
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1. Background and Context

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) organized a virtual roundtable titled 'Impact of COVID-19 on Education' on May 11, 2022 at 03:00 to 04:00 pm (IST) on the zoom platform. Thir virtual roundtable to highlight the adverse impacts of the pandemic on the education sector in India and beyond.

This roundtable discuss the implications of the disruptions caused by the school closures along with several opportunities offered by this situation.

The objectives of the roundtable are:

- To highlight the various disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its concomitant lockdowns on the delivery of education in India and beyond.
- To discuss the various opportunities for innovation such as online education, remote education, specializations, etc. offered by the pandemic.
- To discuss a way ahead to protect the education sector and students from the detrimental impacts of the pandemic.

2. Key Proceedings and Discussions

Session 1

Introduction and Welcome

Mr. Kshitij Gupta from the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) started the proceedings of the roundtable discussion by welcoming all the participants and introducing the theme of the roundtable. He told the it has been almost 2 years since the COVID-19 lockdowns were implemented in India to curb the spread of the pandemic. While several sectors of the economy have resumed business as usual, the schools in India have been closed indefinitely to protect their students. Digital platforms and online classes have helped to fill in the void left by the absence of classroom teaching, yet the limited access of internet in India has proved to be a challenge. As schools reopen after the third wave of COVID-19 in February 2022, it is high time to take stock of the detrimental impact of the pandemic on India’s Education Ecosystem.

The Covid-19 pandemic has battered education systems around the world, affecting close to 90 per cent of the world's student population. Similarly, over 1.5 million schools closed down due to the pandemic in India, affecting 286 million children from pre-primary to secondary levels. This adds to the 6 million girls and boys who were already out of school prior to Covid-19. This disruption in education has severe economic implications too. A World Bank report, 'Beaten or Broken: Informality and Covid-19 in South Asia', has quantified the impact of school closures in monetary terms-India is estimated to lose $440 billion (Rs. 32.3 lakh crore) in possible future earnings.

Session 2

Keynote Address - COVID-19 Impact on Higher Education

Dr. Shweta Sinha, Assistant Professor (Environmental Technology), Thammasat University, Pridi Banomyong International College (PBIC), Thailand, gave the keynote address for this roundtable webinar. She spoke about the ‘Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education’ focusing on how the pandemic had affected colleges and universities. According to UNESCO, the unprecedented disruptions brought about by COVID-19 pandemic
have affected close to 220 million tertiary education students throughout the world. Some of the adverse impacts highlighted by her during her talk include:

- **Access**: The impact of COVID-19 on enrollment varies by regional and income levels. High income and Europe and North American countries are better able to cope with the disruption due to government funding support and increase in domestic enrollment.
- **International mobility**: Mobility took a major hit, affecting international students significantly, but virtual mobility could compensate or even replace physical mobility.
- **University staff**: Despite the closure of many universities, the impact of COVID-19 on university staff compared to the previous academic year is limited.
- **Disruption of research and extension activities**: COVID-19 caused suspension and cancellation of teaching and research activities globally.
- **Widening inequality**: The mixed impact of the pandemic on university finance shed a light on the exacerbation of inequality in higher education. Financial support from the government and external sources are crucial to the survival of HEIs.
- **University operations**: The strong impact of the pandemic on HEIs operations caused reduced maintenance and services on campus and campuses closures worldwide.
- **National challenges**: Health and adaptation to new modes and models of teaching are the top concerns for students and institutions.
- **Transition from higher education to work**: The significant reduction of job opportunities makes the transition from higher education to the labor market more difficult. Employers are also seeking applicants with higher technology skills.
- **National priority**: Strategic options for country-specific response are to improve infrastructure and availability of digital devices for online or distance learning as well as support for teachers and more international collaboration in research and policy dialogues.

Considering these challenges and opportunities, Dr. Shweta Sinha explained the way forward as:

- Expanding online provision as a complement to traditional higher education.
- The success of this digitalisation process may depend on identifying the programme types and components of programmes that are most suitable for digitalization.
- Microcredentials’ on the rise (Peak popularity of the term in May 2021, GoogleTrends)
- Governments, too, view shorter learning programmes as a tool to quickly up-skill and re-skill laid-off workers

**Session 3**

**Impact and Opportunities for Higher Education due to COVID-19**

**Mr. Nghia Trinh**, Regional Resilience and School Safety Specialist, Plan International Asia Pacific, Thailand, took the next session on Impact and Opportunities for Higher Education due to COVID-19. He explained how
the pandemic impacted the various aspects of education, ranging from teaching and learning, research, community engagement, social dimension, education system management, financial impacts.

He went on to highlight the impact of the pandemic on girl students and out-of-school girls. For instance, without the daily routine of education, out-of-school girls are also more likely to experience violence at the hands of relatives, neighbours or others within their communities. Other challenges highlighted by him included, with school closures affecting nearly 91 percent of the world’s student population, Over 1.5 billion learners have had their education disrupted, including 74 million girls (Plan International, 2021). Schools serving 62 million children have been completely closed due to lock downs during the pandemic (UNICEF, 2021).

He also highlighted the findings from a Plan International Report titled ‘Halting Lives 2: Girls and Young Women on the Impact of COVID-19’. The challenges experienced by girls and young women included education discontinuation, increased risk of violence and exploitation, reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services and education, socio economic impacts, increase in both frequency and scale of climate related disasters in the Asia and the Pacific regions.

Perhaps the most distressing fact highlighted by him was that many young women will never return to school: globally it is estimated that 20 million more secondary school aged girls could be out of school after the crisis has passed (Malala.org). He concluded by stating that In conclusion, COVID 19 created an opportunity for change in pedagogical approaches and introduction of virtual education in all levels of education (IJAER, Kumar 2020). In addition to that, there are areas for quality education improvement for future, such as:

- Integrate Environment and Health Courses in the Curriculum
- Strengthen Environmental Policies and Hygiene Practices
- Incorporate an Online Mental Health and Medical Services

**Question Answer**

A brief question and answer session was also held after both the speakers had finished with their talk. Mr. MV Srinivasan, NCERT, India, raised the important question of how an abling ecosystem of education can help all those students who have faced the detrimental impacts of the pandemic on their education. Consequently, he focused on the need to provide mental health and psycho-social support to the children. He also stressed on the design of curriculum for students for the next five years considering the impact.

Awdhesh Kumar, Invertis University, Uttar Pradesh India, also highlighted the fact that students who passed their final year of college during the pandemic have suffered tremendously because they lacked the requisite interface with industry and had to struggle to secure good jobs.

**Session 4**

**Conclusion and Way Ahead**

Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt, Director, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), India, took the concluding session of the webinar wherein he profusely thanked all the participants, panellists and organizers of this virtual
Impact of COVID-19 on Education

Roundtable. He said that this was a significant event because it is helping to shape the policy discourse surrounding the larger issue of education continuity in crisis. Aropos this, he enlisted some key points as way ahead to be submitted to UNESCO and UNDRR as ‘Statement of Action’ of this virtual roundtable.

Way Ahead

1. **Huge and long-term impact on education**
   
   The impact of the pandemic has been huge and long-term, i.e. it has affected an entire generation of learners. Therefore, it warrants urgent action by government and non-government stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great impact on the state of education in India and beyond. The Covid-19 pandemic has battered education systems around the world, affecting close to 90 per cent of the world's student population. Similarly, over 1.5 million schools closed down due to the pandemic in India, affecting 286 million children from pre-primary to secondary levels. This adds to the 6 million girls and boys who were already out of school prior to Covid-19. This would also have long-term impacts on the earning potential of the students who have suffered during these protracted lockdowns. For instance, the World Bank has quantified the impact of school closures in monetary terms-India is estimated to lose $440 billion (Rs. 32.3 lakh crore) in possible future earnings. **Thus, there is a need to measure and take stock of the long-term impact on education.**

2. **Uneven campus and education lockdown methods**
   
   This implies that there was a lot of randomness and lack of standardization in the strategy of lockdown employed by various education institutes. For instance, some educational institutes went in for a total disbandment of physical classes and shifted to online classes, while certain other schools used a staggered approach to holding physical classes with limited attendance. Chaotic student mobility due to the lockdowns when children of the migrant labourers were forced migrate back to their parents village also dealt a devastating blow to education continuity. With the benefit of hindsight, the best approaches to school lockdown and safe re-opening should be documented and be used for future exigencies.

3. **Loss of money and human capital**
   
   There was an excessive amount of loss of money for educational institutes, parents and families of students in the protracted school closures that followed the outbreak of the pandemic. We know from World Bank and Plan International data that Over 1.5 billion learners have had their education disrupted, including 743 million girls. While the financial losses need to be taken into consideration, the loss of human capital due to the protracted lockdowns should also raise concerns for policy makers. This loss of human capital formation could also lead to teething labour and productivity problems in the future. **Thus, it is important to find ways to record money and human capital loss and damage due to the pandemic.**

4. **Providing additional opportunities to students**
   
   Due to the exigent circumstances of the pandemic, many students who were in the final term of their courses missed out on job placement opportunities due to an absolute freezing of the economic activity. This wrong needs to addressed and additional inputs and opportunities need to be provided to such students to ensure that they don’t suffer because of the critical gap in their careers. **Thus, there is a need to focus on the plight of such students and offer them career guidance aid and support.**

5. **Untilizing idle educational infrastructure**
   
   It was also pointed that during the lockdowns, a lot of educational infrastructure lay idle. Better planning for the use of this idle infrastructure is needed to ensure that it helps in overall pandemic response and preparedness. **Thus, imaginative thinking of re-use education infrastructure during the crisis is needed.**

6. **No educational insurance**
   
   Insurance and risk transfer mechanisms for students are needed to protect the vast body of students against the various hazards and risks. Insurance would not only provide them protection from physical harm but insurance is also needed to protect them from mental harm. This insurance should also be extended to education institutions.
7. **Limited networks to support education in Asia Pacific**
   While there are some networks in Asia Pacific to support collaboration in the education space (like Plan International), there is need to add more stakeholders to such networks and expand them properly. **Thus, need to invest in networks across region, sections, and constituency.**

8. **Digital Data on Education**
   There has never been so much data on education as there has been in the past two years of the pandemic. It is now important for policymakers and other humanitarian practitioners to leverage this data on education to make better and more informed decisions in shaping the future of resilience in education sector. **We can start this process by putting the digital data on education in crisis in public domain.**

9. **Nature and extent of vulnerability of the education system**
   This pandemic and its response has clearly shown that we do not fully understand the nature and extent of the vulnerability of education system. The extent and nature of this vulnerability needs to be known across international, regional, national and sub-national levels. The vulnerability at these different levels will warrant specific action points from a variety of stakeholders. **Thus, need to develop and put in place tools and concepts on changing vulnerability of education system.**

10. **Collating Scattered Adaptation Measures**
    The crisis precipitated by the pandemic was also highlighted different kinds of adaptation measures employed by different sets of families and individuals. Some of these adaptation measures can lead to pathways of transformation for building the resilience of education system to any future crisis. For instance, community based measures for education can offer durable solutions for the problem of education continuity in future crisis. **Other such adaptation measures and methods need to be listed out as well.**

AIDMI publication titled, “[Southasiandisasters.net on COVID-19 Impact on Education](https://southasiandisasters.net)” was launched at the session.

It was decided to take the conclusion and way ahead to the organisers of Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction ([https://globalplatform.undrr.org/](https://globalplatform.undrr.org/)).

After concluding remarks, Mr. Kshitij Gupta from AIDMI wrapped up the session by thanking the participants again for their participation.

3. **Virtual Roundtable Photo**
4. Schedule of the Roundtable

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tr>
<td>03:00 to</td>
<td>Welcoming Participants and Experts; Sharing Objectives of the Roundtable</td>
<td>Mr. Kshitij Gupta, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), India</td>
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<td>03:05 to</td>
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<td>Dr. Shweta Sinha, Assistant Professor (Environmental Technology), Thammasat University, Pridi Banomyong International College (PBIC), Thailand</td>
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<td>03:20 to</td>
<td>Impact and Opportunities for Higher Education due to COVID-19</td>
<td>Mr. Nghia Trinh, Regional Resilience and School Safety Specialist, Plan International Asia Pacific, Thailand</td>
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<td>03:50 to</td>
<td>Conclusion and Way Ahead</td>
<td>Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), India</td>
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5. List of Participants

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<td>Abha Mishra</td>
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<td>Anupam Lata</td>
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<td>Chandra Bhakuni</td>
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<td>Deepak Kumar Dubey</td>
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<td>Dr Mohammed Osama</td>
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<td>Dr. Bindu Chib Chib</td>
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<td>Vishal Vasvani</td>
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